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ABSTRACT

The past decade has witnessed a growing interest in parental motivation, but little is known about the psychological factors underlying fertility rates and motivation. To examine the relationship of individual personality factors and expected family size and specific values about having children, 341 college students completed a questionnaire, the Value of Children Scales, and the Personal Values Abstract Scales. No differences were found in fertility expectations by gender, nor were fertility expectations related to the personality variables (femininity, socialization and efficacy). Gender differences were found in the value placed on children. Specific values about children were differentially related to personality factors with efficacy showing the strongest relationship. Fertility expectations were also related to the specific values about children. The findings confirm that men and women value children differently. (Author/JAC)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF FERTILITY VALUES AND SELECTED PERSONALITY FACTORS

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Division 34--Population and Environmental Psychology

by

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The past decade has witnessed a growing interest in parental motivation. Changes in family structure, the status of women, and contraceptive technology have led to increasing concern about whether to have children as well as the advantages and disadvantages of having children--the values of children.

As the question of parenthood has received growing attention, it has become apparent that little is known about parental motivations and factors affecting these motivations. Demographers, sociologists, and economists have shown that childbearing intents and values are affected by population shifts, social changes, demographic considerations, and economic factors. The question for psychologists has remained, "What are the psychological factors underlying fertility rates and motivations?"

This study was concerned with some of the individual personality factors that were hypothesized to be related to both expected family size and specific values of having children. It utilized and modified the model, based on Hoffman and Hoffman (1973), used in the cross-national Value of Children Study (Arnold et al., 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975). (See Appendix) In this model, background and personality factors are viewed as related to both fertility values and expectations. The specific values of children are viewed as intervening variables between background and personality factors and family size expectations. This model is concerned with childbearing expectations and values from an individual level. It is assumed that social trends would affect personality factors and thus ultimately individual childbearing plans and behavior.

The basic theses of the study were that both expected family size and the specific values of children would vary according to sex. Further. they would be related to the personality characteristics of femininity, socialization, and efficacy. Finally, it anticipated that there would be relationships between the expected family size and the specific values of children.

METHOD

Subjects

The sample consisted of 341 undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at Bryant College in Rhode Island. There were 178 (52%) males and 163 (48%) females. The students ranged in age from 18-28 with only 2% between 24 and 28 years old.

Procedure

The main goal of this study was to investigate the relationship of selected personality variables and gender to the expected number of children and childbearing and childrearing values among undergraduates. The dependent variables were the expected

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number of children and the nine specific values of children, which were assessed on the Value of Children Attitude Scales (Arnold et al., 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975). These included children for continuity, tradition, and security; parenthood satisfactions; role motivations of parenthood; happiness and affection from children; goals and incentives from children; social status from children; external controls and pressures towards childbearing; costs of children; and decision-mindedness in childbearing. The independent variables were gender and the three personality variables of femininity, socialization, and personal and interpersonal efficacy which were measured on the Personal Values Abstract, which is derived from the California Personality Inventory (Gough, 1972). Religion and socioeconomic status, as determined by parental occupation (Bogue, 1969) were used as control variables in correlational analyses and analyses of covariance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability

Coefficient alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the Value of Children and the Personal Values Abstract scales. The reliability of all the PVA scales ($r \geq .59$) and all but one of the VOC scales ($r \geq .53$) was good. The extremely low reliability ($r = .07$) of the value external controls on childbearing necessitates minimizing any significance found on this scale.

Expected Number of Children

The mean number of children expected by males was 2.55 (S.D.=1.15) and by females was 2.71(S.D.=1.20). A t-test failed to find significance (t=1.20).

To test the relationship between the personality variables of femininity, socialization and efficacy and the expected number of children, partial correlations were done for the total sample and for each sex, with SES and religion held constant. The relationships were extremely weak with none of the correlations reaching .05 level of significance (r's $< \pm .10$).

Most of the hypotheses concerning expected number of children were not supported. The homogeneity of the sample in expected number of children may have reduced the likelihood of any single factor showing significance.

Values of Children

Separate analyses of covariance were conducted to test whether there were differences in the specific values of children by gender. Partial correlations were done to assess the relationship between the specific values of children and the personality

variables of femininity, socialization and efficacy as well as expected number of children. All analyses were done for the total sample and separately by gender. SES and religion were used as controls.

There were significant gender differences in how children were valued. Men agreed more than women on the following values of children ($p<.01$): continuity, tradition, and security ($F=4.14$); role motivations ($F=4.92$); social status ($F=10.90$) and costs of children ($F=4.10$). Men's greater emphasis on children providing continuity and the costs of children are both consistent with traditional male socialization. The greater agreement by males that children provide an adult role and social status is difficult to interpret. It would be more within female socialization whereby women anticipate and receive roles and status from becoming mothers (Hoffman & Hoffman, 1973; Rainwater, 1960; 1965). One questions whether the college women in this study were reacting against this stereotype.

The study did demonstrate that specific values of children were differentially related to personality factors. The degree of femininity was inversely related ($p<.05$) to valuing children for continuity, tradition and security ($r=-.130$); role motivations ($r=-.131$); social status from children ($r=-.217$); costs of children ($r=-.182$); and decision-mindedness in childbearing ($r=-.108$). However, gender differences rather than degree of femininity may be responsible for these relationships. When separate correlations were performed for each sex, only one relationship was significant. For women, femininity was positively related to goals and incentives from children ($r=.172$, $p<.05$).

Degree of socialization was only minimally related to fertility values. The costs of children and socialization were inversely related ($p<.01$) for the total sample ($r=-.156$) and for women only ($r=-.213$) It had been expected that because highly socialized individuals were less impulsive, they would place greater emphasis on the costs of children and upon decision-mindedness in childbearing. It may be that in a sample of college students, the impulsivity regarding childbearing decisions is not yet pervasive.

The personality characteristic showing the strongest relationship with specific values of children was personal and interpersonal efficacy. For the total sample, degree of efficacy was inversely related ($p<.05$) to the following values: parenthood satisfactions ($r=-.193$), role motivations ($r=-.146$), goals and incentives from children ($r=-.114$), and external controls on childbearing ($r=-.154$). The first two of these relationships were significant for men while for women all of these relations were significant except the relationship between efficacy and role motivation. These results were consistent with the hypothesized model whereby individuals who were more efficacious would be less likely to rely on becoming parents to prove themselves and would be less

subject to external pressures (Groat & Neal, 1973; Pohlman, 1969; Rainwater, 1965).

The number of children expected by respondents was related to how children were valued on seven of the nine specific values of children. Direct relationships were found with most of the positive values ($p<.05$): children for continuity, tradition, and security ($r=.097$); role motivations ($r=.170$); goals and incentives from children ($R=.349$); and external controls on childbearing ($r=.171$). Inverse relationships were found with the values of social status from children ($=-.121$), costs of children ($r=-.180$), and decision-mindedness in childbearing ($r=-.188$) (all p's$<.05$). These results were generally as might be expected. People who wanted larger families were more likely to emphasize the positive values of having children and the pressure towards childbearing while deemphasizing the costs of childbearing and need for deliberation before becoming a parent. Surprisingly, those who wanted smaller families were more likely to agree that children brought social status. This is consistent with Veevers' research (1973a,b) which found those wanting no children more conscious of the implicit social status gained from parenthood.

CONCLUSIONS

The expected number of children was not different by gender nor was it related to the three personality variables of femininity, socialization and efficacy. The failure to find any single personality trait which was related to the expected number of children suggests that future research might find more significance in combining or dealing with clusters of personality traits that capitalize on dynamic interaction of personality traits.

The results of this study confirm that men and women value children differently.

The study also demonstrated that specific values of children were differentially related to personality factors. The personality factor showing the strongest relationship with the specific values of children was efficacy.

Finally, this study did find that specific values of children were related to the number of children expected by respondents. A direct relationship was found between expected family size and most of the positive values of children and a negative relationship with the constraints against having children.

Further research using more diverse samples is needed in this area. In particular, longditudinal research is needed to assess changes over the lifespan.

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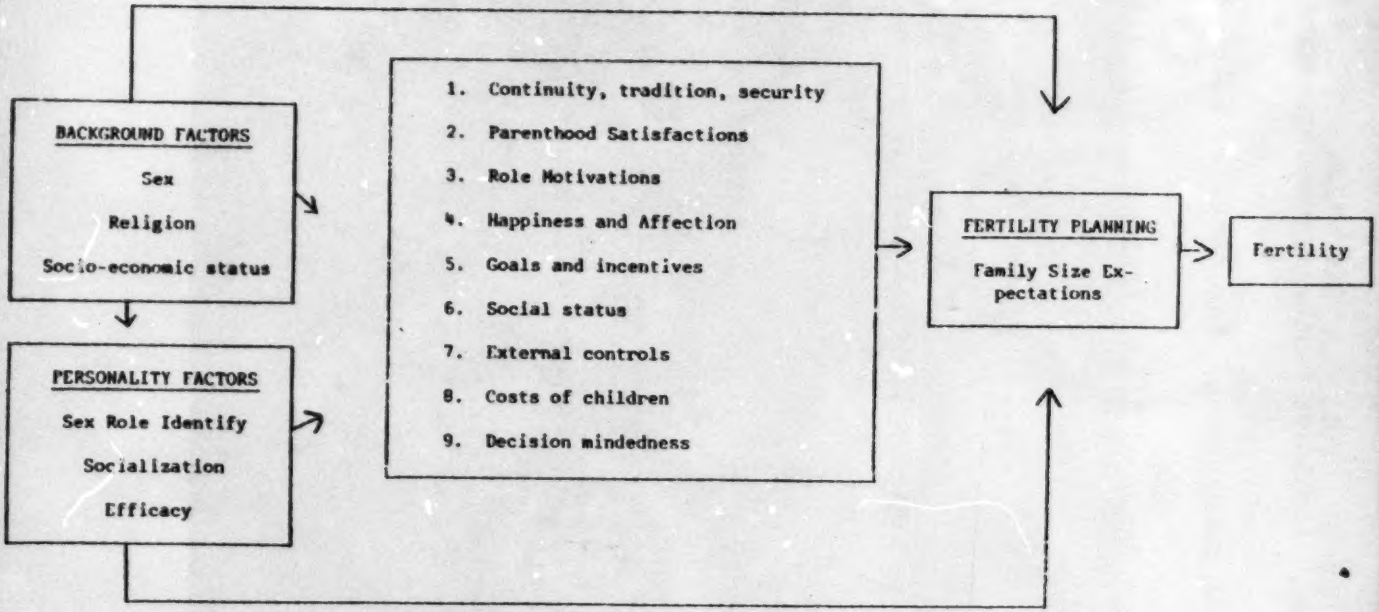
APPENDIX

Conceptual Model of the Current Study



Adapted from the Value of Children Study (Arnold et al., 1975, p. 8)